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## IGWEBUIKE THEOLOGY OF UDI: RECONCILING GOD'S UNCHANGING REVELATION WITH MAN'S CHANGING CULTURE

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### Abstract

*The questions that have been looming at the thoughts of many African theologians for years have been: How can the Christian faith be made to be at home in Africa, in such a way that it harmonizes with African beliefs and practices, thus becoming the religion of the African people? What is the relationship between African traditional religion and culture with the Christian faith? Does being a Christian mean that I should distance myself from my traditional religious and cultural heritages? It is from this background that Igwebuike theology emerges as an African theology, posting that effort towards evangelization must begin from the understanding of the African worldview and the incorporation of such in the processes of the communication and learning of the Christian faith. This work presented the theology of African typology (udi, meaning type, kind or nature) within the context of Igwebuike theology, with a view to creating a balance in the midst of the conflicts between Christianity and African religion and culture by connecting the events of the New Testament to events and persons in African traditional religion and culture. This connection is such that the events, persons, realities, etc., in African traditional religion and culture find meaning and fulfillment in the New Testament Scriptures. The Igwebuike theology of udi has created an aperture for further dialogue of culture with faith. It provided a deeper meaning and wider capacity for the application of the concept, 'typology'. It has contributed to the continuous search for better ways of making the Christian faith feel at home in Africa, and also making it possible for the redemption of the African culture through its interaction with faith. For the purpose of this study, the Igwebuike theoretical framework, which emphasizes beginning from and valuing what is known, and using what is already known as a stepping stone to get to the unknown, was adopted.*

**Keywords:** Igwebuike, Theology, Udi, Faith, Revelation, Culture, Missionaries

### Introduction

The missionary enterprise in Africa, aimed at converting 'pagans' and establishing the Church, was not without a methodology. First, they employed

the methodology of imposition of the Christian message; the second was the translation of the Christian message which was mostly in English to the local languages of the African people, and third, the adaptation of the Christian message into the African religious culture. Through imposition, doctrines, religious customs, morals and ways of acting and praying taken from foreign cultures were forced on the African people. While this might seem like a clear option left to the missionaries, they disregarded and belittled the culture of the African people in the process; the consequence is that the faith has no root and thus, the message remains strange to those who host it. The idea of imposition was based on a wrong conception of Christianity as a finished product rather than a faith that reaches its full potential through dialogue with the local cultures of host communities.

This might have worked with the early missionaries; however, with Africans being part of evangelization, disenchantment began to emerge as regards the missionaries' spiteful attitude to African culture and tradition (Bujo, 1992) and her highhanded approach to the African reality (Dickson, 1984). It was from this background that the need for an African theology emerged; a theology that would put into consideration the African reality in its approaches. The concept of *Igwebuike* theology flows from this background, however, putting into cognizance and giving a special place to the rich African heritage. It is, therefore, from the principles of *Igwebuike* that the idea of an African typology would be generated and discussed for the purpose of creating a balance in the midst of the conflicts between Christianity and African religion and culture. The African theology of *udi* (type or image), an Igbo-African concept of typology, would be employed to connect the events of the New Testament to events and persons in African traditional religion and culture. These connections would be made in a way such that the events, persons, realities, etc., in African traditional religion and culture would find meaning and fulfillment in the New Testament Scriptures.

### **Understanding *Igwebuike* Theology**

The questions looming at the thoughts of many African theologians for years have been: How can the Christian faith be made to be at home in Africa, in such a way that it harmonizes with African beliefs and practices? What is the relationship between African traditional religion and culture with the Christian faith? Does being a Christian mean that I cannot be part of the traditional activities of my

people? Why must I change my name to a foreign name before I can become a Christian? It is from this background that *Igwebuike* theology emerges as an African theology that strongly believes that effort towards evangelization must begin from the understanding of the African worldview and the incorporation of such in the processes of the communication and learning of the Christian faith. For theology to be at home in Africa, *Igwebuike* theology argues that it must be contextual rather than hang on an ivory tower; and by being contextual, the looming questions begin to get their answers.

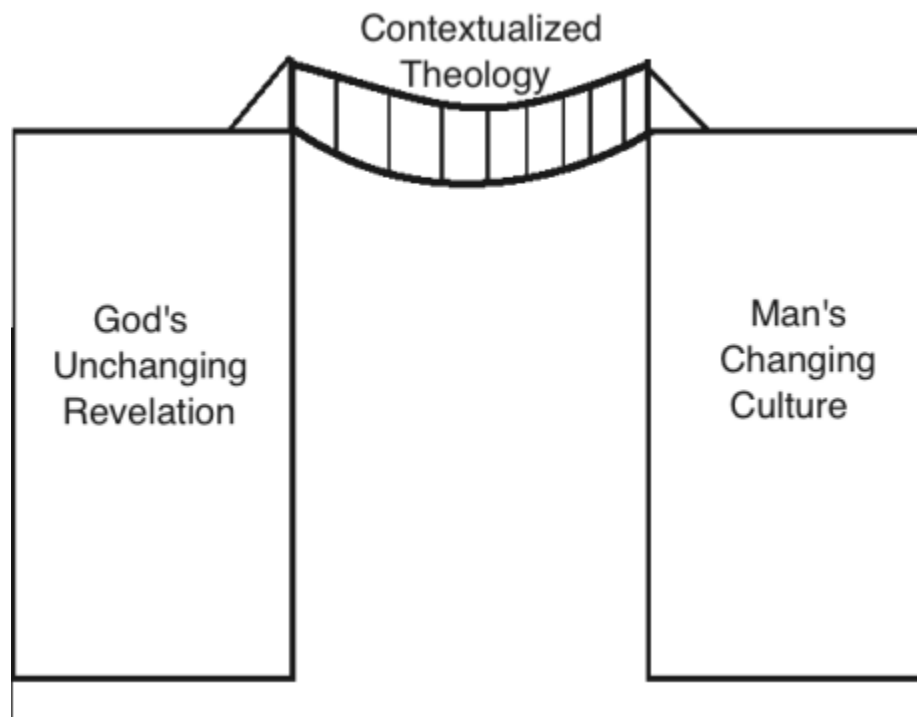


Figure 1- Source: Missionmusings (2017)

The basis for contextualization is the change that is possible within the permanence of the Christian faith. God's revelation and the cultural context of the respondent are two different realities, however, forming the bridge for communication. While God's revelation is unchanging, comprising the Christ, Holy Bible, tradition, the culture of the human is dynamic and more varied. The faith would be irrelevant unless it is understood and valued by the recipients in their respective cultures. What theology does is to create a forum for dialogue of faith and culture in such a way that it is understood and appreciated by peoples

of all cultures. Thus, *Igwebuike* theology as a contextualized enterprise creates a bridge between God's unchanging revelation and the human person's changing culture.

The concept *Igwebuike* began first as a methodology and philosophy. Gradually, its philosophical element began to have implications for theological discourse, especially with the increasing need to do theology that arises from the philosophy of the African people. Such a theology would always have an inescapable element of philosophy, speaking to people in their own native context, because it is expressed in categories of thought that arises out of the philosophy of the African people. However, the expression, *Igwebuike*, is an Igbo word which means 'number is strength' or 'number is power' (Kanu, 2017f). However, beyond the literal sense of *Igwebuike*, it means *otu obi* (one heart and one soul) – *cor unum et anima una*. In a metaphoric sense, it is used within the Igbo linguistic setting to refer to relational engagement in the world, accomplished in solidarity and complementarity, and the powerful and insurmountable force therein (Kanu, 2017g). The closest words to it in English are complementarity, solidarity and harmony. In this way, *Igwebuike* conceptualizes or captures the nature of the African universe.

What *Igwebuike* does is that it captures the nature of the African universe and uses it as a framework for discussions within theology. The value that it brings to the table of theological discussions is its emphasis on the African worldview as an indispensable element in any successful African theological discussion, that such a discussion might be relevant to the African. Thus, *Igwebuike* theology would mean the quest to arrive at a unique understanding of faith in Christ in such a way that it captures the African worldview and his/her life circumstances. Only thus will evangelization respond to the inadequacies of the missionary enterprise, give birth to a new African personality and be in accord with the legitimate aspiration of the African people. *Igwebuike* theology does not in any way imply a change in the Church's theology- it is the same theology, a systematic and scientific discourse on God, presented in such a way that it fits into the African religious, social, anthropological and philosophical realities, mentality and needs. The focus on Christ, the Scripture and tradition is not altered in any way. They remain the inevitable revelatory agents.

This notwithstanding, *Igwebuike* theology is based on the following fundamental lines:

- a. It understands theology as contextual, that is, a theology of life and culture that is accountable to the context in which the African people live.
- b. It understands reality as complementary and interconnected.
- c. It understands African traditional religion and culture as a preparation for the gospel message.
- d. It understands theology as an enterprise that provides answers to the human person's innermost and deepest longings, that is, the search for happiness (God).
- e. Its sources include the Bible, African philosophy, religion and culture, African anthropology, and African experiences.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research is based on the *Igwebuike* theory of beginning from and valuing what is known as a first step, and then using what is already known as a stepping stone to get to the unknown. It uses the known as a stepping stone to get to the unknown reality. This approach is based on the very nature of learning itself. The first step of learning is observation (Kanu, 2019). What children observe become "known" to them, and it is by comparing what they already know with some other thing unknown to them that they learn new realities.

In relation to evangelization, you begin from the culture of the people, which is the known and from there you take the people to what they do not know. To disregard the culture of a people and then begin to tell them about what they do not know would not only affect their disposition but would create a missing link. What missing links does is that it distorts the complementary whole of reality. In this context, the African culture serves as a missing link in the process of evangelization, and giving it its rightful place helps evangelization to have 'a head and a tail' (*nwe isi na odu*). There is the need for mutual service in complementarity between the African culture and the Christian faith. Thus, Asouzu (2007) avers that: "... any mode in which being finds expression has an intrinsic moment of dynamic mutual service in Complementarity" (p. 266). Outside the circumference of the understanding of culture as a missing link in evangelization, evangelization ends in chaos and conflicts.

This understanding of culture as a missing link within the framework of evangelization is anchored on the cultural realism that holds that no culture is inherently superior or inferior to the other. The thought of inferiority of

superiority kills regard for the other, which is an indispensable part of the whole. The reason for the position that no culture is superior or inferior to the other is because cultures are distinct, and there is no common standard for the judging of culture. The standard for the evaluation of one culture might not be the standard for the evaluation of the other culture. Most missionaries were ethnocentric, in the sense that they judged African culture, believing that its standards and values were inferior to the Western or Christian culture.

### **Towards an African Typology (*Udi*)**

An interesting aspect of biblical studies is the area of typology. Bullinger (1968) defines typology as “a figure or ensample of something future and more or less prophetic, called the ‘Antitype’” (p. 768). Muenscher (cited by Terry, 1890) understands typology as a study of “the preordained representative relation which certain persons, events, and institutions of the Old Testament bear to corresponding persons, events, and institutions in the New” (Terry, 1890, 246). In the contention of Broomall (1960): “A type is a shadow cast on the pages of Old Testament history by a truth whose full embodiment or antitype is found in the New Testament revelation” (p. 533). As a theological concept and method of investigation, there are several words in the New Testament scripture that form its scriptural basis.

Paul uses the Greek word *Tupos* in Romans 5:14 (which means a ‘type of’ in English), to speak of Adam as a type of Christ. A second word is *Skia* in Colossians 2:17 (which means ‘shadow’); Paul employs it to speak of the Mosaic system as a shadow of things to come. Related to these is *Hupodeigma* in Hebrews 9:23 (which means ‘copy’). *Parabole* in Hebrews 9:9 (which means ‘parable’) has also been used to speak of the tabernacle of the Old Testament as a figure for the present time. Another word that points to typology is *Antitupon* in Hebrews 9:24 (which means ‘figure’, ‘likeness’ or ‘pattern’). They were employed to denote the fulfillment of a prophetic picture or a correspondence between things, persons, events, etc., in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Moorehead (1930) brings out the distinctive features of typology thus:

What are the distinctive features of a type? A type, to be such in reality, must possess three well-defined qualities. (1) It must be a true picture of the person or the thing it represents or prefigures. A type is a draft or sketch of some well-defined feature of redemption, and therefore it must in some distinct way resemble its antitype, e.g. Aaron as high priest is a rough figure of Christ the Great High Priest, and the Day of Atonement in

Israel (Leviticus 16) must be a true picture of the atoning work of Christ. (2) The type must be of divine appointment. In its institution it is designed to bear a likeness to the antitype. Both type and antitype are preordained as constituent parts of the scheme of redemption. As centuries sometimes lie between the type and its accomplishment in the antitype, of course infinite wisdom alone can ordain the one to be the picture of the other. Only God can make types. (3) A type always prefigures something future (pp. 3029-3030).

Examples of type in the scripture include: the Passover, with its spotless lamb (Exodus 12:5) which was slain "between the two evenings" (12:6), i.e., between three and 3:00 P.M., without any bones being broken (12:46). It was a type of the death of Jesus (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:7), who was without spot or blemish (1 Peter 1:19), who died at about 3:00 P.M. (Matthew 27:46), and who had none of His bones broken (John 19:33ff). The Feast of the First-Fruits (Leviticus 23:10), i.e., Pentecost, was a celebration in which the initial produce of the harvest was offered to God as a token of the full crop to follow. This ritual typified: (1) the early influx of the Jews into the Church of Christ (Romans 11:16); and, (2) the resurrection of the Lord Jesus as God's pledge of the general resurrection to ultimately come (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23). The Feast of the Tabernacles was instituted to commemorate Israel's sojourn in the wilderness (Leviticus 23:43). But it was also designed to remind us that we are but sojourners on this earth (1 Peter 2:11), and that someday we will lay aside this earthly tabernacle (2 Corinthians 5:1; 2 Peter 1:13, 14) for a more permanent abiding place (cf. Hebrews 11:9-13).

On the annual Jewish Day of Atonement, amidst numerous other rituals, the high priest presented two goats before the door of the tabernacle. After the casting of lots upon these animals, one was sacrificed as a "sin-offering" and the other was "set alive before Jehovah" (Leviticus 16:9, 10). The blood of the slain goat was taken into the most holy place where it was sprinkled upon the mercy seat. This, of course, was typical of the sacrificial death of Christ (Hebrews 9:11, 12). The high priest then took the living goat, laid hands upon him and confessed over him all the iniquities of the people. Subsequently, by an appointed servant, the animal was led away into the wilderness (Leviticus 16:21, 22). The two goats were, so to speak, two sides of the same coin. Both constituted the solitary offering of Christ. The one signified His death and the atoning effect of his blood,

the other His resurrection (cf. Romans 4:25) and the complete removal of our sins (cf. Isaiah 53:4, 6; John 1:29) (Wayne 2019).

The flood of Noah's day (Genesis 6-8) typified the sudden destruction of the world yet to come at the end (Matthew 24:37-39). The miraculous water from the rock in the wilderness (Exodus 17:6) was a preview of the life-sustaining water provided by our Lord (John 4:14; 1 Corinthians 10:4). The manna from heaven in the wilderness (Exodus 16:14-16) was a type of that spiritual bread who came down from heaven to nourish humanity (John 6:32). The deliverance of Noah's family from a corrupted world, by means of "water," prefigured our salvation, through baptism, from the power of darkness into the kingdom of Christ (cf. 1 Peter 3:20-21; Colossians 1:13). The brazen serpent, lifted up in the wilderness, through which the people found physical healing (Numbers 21:8), was a type of the lifted-up Christ (John 3:14; 12:32), through whom spiritual healing comes (Isaiah 53:5) (Wayne 2019).

Adam is a type of Christ in that, as the former introduced sin into the world, even so, through the latter, a system of righteousness was made available for mankind (Romans 5:19). Melchizedek, who was both king of Salem and a priest of God – **at the same time** (Genesis 14:18-20) – was a type of Christ. Jesus, at His ascension, began to reign on David's throne and to simultaneously function as our high priest (cf. Psalm 110:4; Zechariah 6:12, 13; Hebrews 5:5-10; 6:20; 7:1-17). This point, incidentally, is disastrous for millennialism. If Christ is not yet king (as premillennialism asserts), then He is not yet a priest, and we are **yet in our sins!** Moses, in his noble role of prophet, leader, and mediator for Jehovah's people, was typical of the Lord Jesus who functions in a similar, though in a more exalted, capacity (cf. Deuteronomy 18:15; Acts 3:22; 1 Corinthians 10:2; Galatians 3:27; 3:19; 1 Timothy 2:5) (Wayne 2019).

From the foregoing, it becomes easier to now understand typology from an African context. It is a little bit different from the biblical concept of it, since it relates the Old Testament events, persons, things, places, etc., to New Testament events, persons, things, places, etc. Typology in its Igbo-African context would be expressed as *udi*, which means 'kind' (a kind of something), 'type' (a type of something) or 'nature' (the nature of something). From this root, African typology may be defined as the preordained representative relation, which certain persons, events, and institutions of the African religious and cultural



heritage bear to corresponding persons, events, and institutions in the New Testament scriptures.

In relation to African traditional culture and religion, the base for relationship changes from the Old Testament scripture to the religio-cultural experiences, categories, events or persons in traditional African culture and religion, which may find their fulfillment in the New Testament scripture. This is anchored on the fact that African traditional religion and culture is understood as a gift from God, given in preparation for evangelization. It holds that the events, persons and things in traditional African religion were not so much about the time of their expression, but had the capacity for fulfillment in the future with the fullness of revelation in Christ Jesus. These patterns often have their greatest manifestations in the life of Christ or in the eschaton, but there may be one or more other fulfillments elsewhere in human history, especially in the immediate historical context. An example of an African theology of *udi* is the kola nut as *udi* Holy Communion in the New Testament scripture.

**Table 1: The Kola Nut as *Udi* Holy Communion**

No	Holy Communion	The Kola Nut
1.	The Holy Communion is made of bread, which was a common meal among the Jewish people.	The kola nut among the Igbo is a common meal.
2.	The bread is held with reverence.	When the kola nut is treated with great reverence.
3.	It is the product of the human effort at cultivating the earth.	It is the product of the human effort at cultivating the earth.
4.	The Holy Communion is Life <b>(John 6:25-59 and John 25:56).</b>	The kola nut is a symbol of life.
5.	The Holy Communion is a sign of unity.	The kola nut symbolizes mutual respect and community.
6.	Jesus chose from among His followers who would continue to offer this sacrifice.	The kola nut is only blessed by men in Igbo traditional society.
8.	After consecration, the priest breaks the bread and hands it over to worshippers.	After the kola nut has been consecrated, it is broken and shared to those present.
9.	The priest calls on the Saints and	During the consecration of the kola

	asks for their intercession.	nut, the ancestors are invoked.
10.	During the consecration of bread, wine is also offered.	During the consecration of the kola nut, liquor is also offered.
11.	At the end of the Eucharistic celebration, the people are blessed.	The people present at the consecration of the kola nut are blessed as well.
12.	The Holy Communion is a sacrament, which speaks of an earthly sign with inward grace.	The kola nut acknowledges the archetypal patterns of the gods and ancestors in <i>illo tempore</i> .
13	The priests preside at the Mass.	The most elderly person present presides at the consecration of the kola nut. In the Greek society, it is <i>presbyteros</i> , meaning elder.
14	Only those who are not in the state of sin are allowed to partake of the Eucharistic meal.	Those who have evil in their heart do not share in the kola nut.
15	The Eucharist is the centre and summit of the Church's life and prayer.	The kola nut is the centre and life of Igbo traditional celebrations.

## Conclusion

Scripture scholars generally agree that the book of Genesis was written during the exile to counter the Babylonian myths of the origin of the human person. It is in this regard that Gallagher (1997) observes that the narrative of Genesis was an early example of dialogue between faith and culture, "as against the Babylonian stories of wars and chaos, Genesis shows God freely and serenely creating as a gift to humanity, and indeed portraying God as an artist rejoicing in the sheer goodness of the finished work" (p. 105). He further maintains that these texts are much more than the stories of origin. They are rooted in God's continuing relationship with us in our responsibility for one another and human history.

When God tells us to multiply and rule the earth, He gives us the mandate of continuing His work of creation, and this provides a biblical basis for us to see culture as a human response to God's continuing creative gift, since culture is a product of human ingenuity and creativity. And if all that God has made is good, human culture is also good. This does not rule out the proclivity of culture to become sour and lose its beauty; in that case, culture would need redemption. For

John Paul II (1995), this is where Christianity has the capacity to transform human cultures, where necessary, so that they follow the logic proper to the mystery of redemption.

What *Igwebuike* theology of *udi* does is that it creates an aperture for further dialogue of culture with faith. It provides a deeper meaning and wider capacity for the application of the concept of 'typology'. The purpose of this development is to contribute to the continuous search for better ways of making the Christian faith feel at home in Africa, and also making it possible for the redemption of the African culture through its interaction or relationship with faith.

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